

As a result of the nature of the treaties, the culture of the area, containing both Arab and Iranian elements, has been preserved practically free of any foreign admixture. Dr. A. R. Lindt,¹¹ a Swiss observer writing in 1939, was particularly impressed by this achievement. Slowly, however, twentieth-century influences have begun to appear. In the early 1930's Great Britain, in the course of a quarrel over oil concessions in Iran, relocated its air routes to India over Trucial 'Oman instead of Iran. Rights to land seaplanes at Dibai and landplanes at Sharjah were acquired, and maintenance crews and other personnel were permanently stationed there. To ensure safety during local wars, overnight quarters for passengers, with permanent armed guards, were established in a fortified compound near Sharjah. Landing fees, levied according to the number of passengers, were payable to the sheikhs in whose territory landings took place. These landing fees constituted a large part of the revenues of the sheikh of Sharjah, whose only other income is derived from a tax on pearling, which is hard to collect.¹² During the war, rights to make emergency landings on the island of Yas were also acquired by the British government. Today, larger planes can fly directly from Bahrein to Karachi, and little use is made of the landing rights on the Trucial Coast, so that the sheikhs' revenues must have decreased substantially. The introduction of the motorcar has also had a marked effect on the local economy. Traffic from inland oases and the Gulf of 'Oman to the cities on the shores of the Persian Gulf is important, though no statistical data are available.

The presence of oil had been suspected since the beginning of the century, but the inaccessibility of the region together with its uncertain political status

¹⁰ O'Shea, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹¹ *Politics in the Persian Gulf*, *Journ. Royal Central Asian Soc.*, Vol. 26, 1939, pp. 619-633.

¹⁰ O'Shea, *op. cit.*, pp. 76 and 140.

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down metal strips or even to construct a concrete surface. The advice of the Public Works Department was sought; they advised the Government that, since the ground was below sea-level and contained a veritable lake ten feet below the surface, the project would require an expensive pumping installation which, together with the materials, which would have to be imported from England, plus the skilled labour required, would cost not less than £1,000,000. The Air Ministry, looking for once into the future, and realizing that with new types of aircraft Sharjah might lose some of its former importance and usefulness, quickly decided that they would take no action. Thus, if the Sheikh of Sharjah or any of the Oman financiers imagine that the airfield is likely to become a 'Heath Row' of the East, they had better think again. 508

It is, of course, impossible to prophecy accurately the future of anything, but judging by present-day trends in aviation I do not think it is unduly pessimistic to foretell a day, perhaps in five or ten years' time, when Sharjah will be virtually closed down as a civil airport. I do believe it is likely, however, that it may be used by smaller aircraft, such as Dragon Rapides or Dominies and Lockheed types, which may operate shuttle services between bases on the Gulf. There is a tremendous trade in pearls and piece-goods between Arabia, Iraq and India, and time is an important factor in business to-day in the East. The modern Indian or Arab business man prefers to travel by plane, and I am confident that an internal air-line between Cairo and Karachi, stopping at Lydda, Baghdad, Basrah, Bahrain and Sharjah *en route*, would have a steady and growing demand. If such an air-line is not operated by British Overseas Airways, then it is fairly certain that an Indian civil air organization will obtain permission to operate one. 439

The American air authorities are extremely anxious to operate air-lines on this route, over which they have been flying military planes since 1942, and there is little doubt that they would welcome the opportunity of running short feeder services between Baghdad and Karachi, via Sharjah, if the British Government decided not to continue operating on this route. The Americans, who were represented at Sharjah by a unit of Air Transport Command, had an efficient air-line organization at Sharjah in 1945. It was built almost entirely by the Air Ministry Public Works Department, and the erection of buildings and hangars had priority over the R.A.F. and B.O.A.C. Flying Control management was shared by the A.T.C. and the R.A.F., whilst the Americans had their own 508 509

THE SAND KINGS OF OMAN

508 extremely accurate meteorological service. They were independent
 509 for water supply and electric power, and their organization from every point of view was impressively efficient. A considerable number of their pilots, ground staff and administrative officers and engineers were former employees of Pan-American Airways and American Export Lines.

From conversation I had with some of the senior American officers, it was perfectly clear that they anticipated no difficulties in operating civil air-lines on this route after the war. It was true that the buildings and installations had been erected by British labour, and not by themselves (a condition necessitated by the treaty with the Trucial Oman sheikhs, whereby foreign nations were prohibited from acquiring political or commercial interests in the territory), but the American viewpoint seemed to be: 'we have expended millions of dollars in operating an efficient war machine in the Persian Gulf, and thus helping you to win the fight in Burma. It is only right that we should be allowed to run a civil air-line on this route in peace-time, especially if you do not want to use it.'

000 Whatever the rights of the case may be, there can be little doubt that, at the present stage of British aircraft development, American air-lines such as Pan-American would soon, from the commercial point of view, 'drive us out of the air' if they operated on this route; against their larger, faster, and more efficiently run planes, we should be left standing and British prestige in India and the Middle East would suffer a serious set-back.

Commercially and strategically, the Persian Gulf has always been one of our life-lines; progress in aviation has not lessened its importance. It is essential for us to maintain an air-line between India and the Middle East, even if it be merely a token service, and the purpose of this could be achieved economically by the operation of internal feeder lines to cope with passengers and freight. If the British Government has the foresight to undertake such a service, Sharjah and the other small intermediary bases will continue to be used for many years.

Regarded from the angle of military strategy alone the Persian Gulf area will continue to dominate the scene of international politics for many years. For one thing, it is in the middle of our vital sea-lines to India, dividing Asia from the Middle East and West, and provides harbours, anchorages and re-fuelling ports which are essential in war-time. The country which has full armed control of the Trucial Oman Coast, which it could use as the main

let, and milk are staple articles of diet, and 262
may be supplemented by fish, meat and
vegetables, depending upon the resources of
the individual families.

Although trails link the principal towns 506
of Trucial Oman and Muscat, coastwise 509
dhow traffic forms the chief means of communication. Steamers from Indian to Persian Gulf ports call irregularly at Dibai and Sharja. A flying boat station and an airport are located at Dibai and Sharja, respectively, and are used occasionally by commercial airlines.

ENVIRONMENT AND SANITATION

Water is scarce throughout most of this 312
region. Supplies for domestic and irrigation purposes are obtained from springs, wells and rain-water cisterns, but underground sources are unreliable, except in limited areas north of Dibai. Artesian waters are found chiefly in the vicinity of Sharja. The western part of the territory is particularly arid: water for Abu Dhabi is transported by boat from Dibai.

The standards of sanitation are generally 364
low. The methods of sewage disposal are primitive, and, although latrines are employed in the towns, indiscriminate pollution of the soil is a widespread practice.

The insects and the animals of medical 164
importance native to Trucial Oman are 136
comparable with those encountered under similar environmental conditions along the eastern coast of Arabia. Few entomologic studies have been recorded, but *Anopheles culicifacies* is known to be present, and is regarded as the principal vector of malaria. It breeds prolifically in wells, cisterns and irrigation ditches. *A. stephensi* also has been identified at Khor al Kalba, and is probably a vector in some localities. Flies are plentiful in towns and villages, and several species undoubtedly are implicated in the transmission of intestinal and eye infections.

HEALTH SERVICES AND MEDICAL FACILITIES

Public health services are almost non- 744

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